

Oral Communication Apprehension in Oral Presentation among Polytechnic Students

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Abstract

In the present study, factors were investigated that caused oral communication apprehension among polytechnic students when performing oral presentations. The specific objectives of the study were: (a) to compare the communication apprehension level associated with five factors and (b) to find out if there were relationships among the five factors, namely, personality traits, preparation level, audience factor, language proficiency, and confidence level. For this descriptive study, communication apprehension data was obtained from 373 students in a polytechnic college using a 23-item Likert-scale questionnaire. The results showed that the audience factor caused the greatest oral communication apprehension, as respondents reported being affected by negative expressions seen on the audience members' faces. The factors causing a moderate level of oral presentation apprehension were preparation, language ability, personality traits, and confidence. The findings suggest communication apprehension related to oral presentation can be reduced by giving skills to presenters in objectively analyzing the audience's reactions, practicing rehearsals, and using audience engagement strategies.

Keywords: *Oral communication, apprehension, polytechnic students, English subjects*

Introduction

Oral presentation is a common assessment tool at all levels of education in Malaysia, where students give oral presentations, sometimes with visual aids. Through oral presentations, students get to practise their speaking skills and develop confidence to speak to an audience. Students' communication competence is demonstrated by their ability to provide a particular audience, such as their industry and faculty supervisors, with a compelling oral presentation that prompts a response, understanding, appreciation, or critical inquiry (Yusoff, 2010). Good oral presentation skills are important to succeed in job interviews and to make convincing reports and arguments in meetings. In colleges and universities, good oral presentation skills are important to score in assessments and to exchange information with peers and instructors.

Students may face some challenges when giving oral presentations, such as the inability to articulate their thoughts, which may lead to mumbling (Soomro et al., 2019). Moreover, students might have a meek disposition and feel awkward in front of an audience (Raja, 2017). They may avoid their instructor's eyes, and forget what they want to say (Al-Nouh et al., 2015). A hesitant delivery and lack of eye contact results in a poor presentation performance and, if evaluated as a coursework assessment, may result in unsatisfactory grades. Besides public speaking, students might also feel uncomfortable in group discussions, meetings, as well as other interpersonal conversations (Bastida & Yap, 2019). McCroskey (1977, pp. 78–79) described this situation as oral communication apprehension, which is defined as the "the predisposition to avoid communication, if possible. Communication apprehension is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons."

Studies in various settings have indicated that students often experience oral communication apprehension, particularly under assessment conditions (e.g., Kakepoto et al., 2012). McCroskey's (1984) early study in Japan indicated that three-fourths of the students were classified as having high levels of communication apprehension in both Japanese and English. In the United Kingdom, students

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